

Message Text

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SUBJECT: BY-ELECTION IN SHAHSAVAR

REF: TEHRAN A-99 JUNE 30, 74

SUMMARY: IN WHAT WAS BILLED AS REHEARSAL FOR 1975 GENERAL ELECTIONS, IRAN NOVIN AND MARDOM PARTIES COMPETED IN BY-ELECTION SEPTEMBER 27 IN SHAHSAVAR, MAZANDARAN PROVINCES. IRAN NOVIN CANDIDATE KHALATBARY, DISTANT RELATIVE OF FOREIGN MINISTER, WON BY ONLY 646 VOTES OUT OF OVER 16,000 CAST. IN LINE WITH GOI ASSURANCES THAT IRANIAN ELECTIONS WOULD HENCEFORTH BE FAIR, SHAHSAVAR CONTEST WAS CLOSELY SUPERVISED BY MINISTER OF INTERIOR AMOUZEGAR AND SUBORDINATES WHO STRESSED NON-PARTIALITY OF GOI. IN FACT, HOWEVER, THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT OUTCOME HAD BEEN DECIDED UPON BEFOREHAND ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT CLEAR BY WHOM. CONTRAST BETWEEN GOI PRONOUNCEMENTS ABOUT OPEN ELECTIONS AND ABUSES WHICH TOOK PLACE PROBABLY WILL INCREASE CYNICISM ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF FREE GENERAL ELECTIONS NEXT SUMMER AND ABOUT AMOUZEGAR'S ABILITY TO BRING OFF ELECTORAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS TO WHICH HE IS PUBLICLY PLEDGED. END SUMMARY.

1. SHAHSAVAR SEAT IN LOWER HOUSE BECAME VACANT IN APRIL WHEN INCUMBENT EZATOLLAH YAZDANPANAHI WAS NAMED MINISTER OF STATE.

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SPECIAL ELECTION SEPT 27 WAS WIDELY PUBLICIZED AS PREVIEW OF

FREE ELECTIONS WHICH GOI SAYS WILL BE HELD IN 1975. TO EMPHASIZE IMPORTANCE OF THIS FIRST ELECTION SINCE SHAH'S PRONOUNCEMENTS ON ELECTION PROCEDURES AND APPOINTMENT OF NON-PARTY MAN JAMSHID AMOUZEGAR AS MINISTER OF INTERIOR, SHAHSAVAR AREA WAS HOST TO SEVERAL MININT UNDERSECRETARIES AT VARIOUS TIMES DURING CAMPAIGN. ON ELECTION DAY AMOUZEGAR HIMSELF, NUMEROUS MININT OFFICIALS, SIX ARMY AND GENDARMERIE GENERALS AND OVER 160 IRAN NOVIN AND MARDOM PARTY OFFICIALS WERE IN SHAHSAVAR AND NEARBY RAMSAR.

2. BOTH PARTIES MADE MAJOR EFFORTS ON BEHALF THEIR CANDIDATES. MARDOM NOMINATED PROMINENT LOCAL FARMER AND PERENNIAL CANDIDATE MOHAMMAD REZA KABIRI, WHILE IRAN NOVIN NAMED MANSOUR KHALATBARY, A PHYSICIAN AND DISTANT RELATIVE OF FOREIGN MINISTER. ACCORDING TO MARDOM ACTIVIST MUZZAFAR AMIRI, IRAN NOVIN SPENT OVER \$45,000 ON ELECTION CAMPAIGN, A LARGE SUM FOR A SINGLE BY-ELECTION. IN AN UNUSUAL MOVE, AN INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE, GHOLAMALI KIA, BRIEFLY ENTERED RACE BUT LATER WITHDREW IN FAVOR OF IRAN NOVIN CANDIDATE. KABIRI'S GREATER POPULARITY WAS SEEN LOCALLY AS APPROXIMATELY BALANCED BY IRAN NOVIN'S RESOURCES BUT MOST LOCAL RESIDENTS EXPECTED KABIRI WOULD WIN BY A NARROW MARGIN IN A FREE ELECTION.

3. IN FACT, ELECTION WENT OTHER WAY, ALTHOUGH MARDOM CANDIDATE RECEIVED FAR HIGHER PROPORTION OF TOTAL VOTE THAN IN LAST SHAHSAVAR ELECTION. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THIS OUTCOME HAD BEEN DECIDED UPON BEFOREHAND AND JUST ENOUGH MANIPULATION ALLOWED TO ENSURE DESIRED RESULT. STRONGEST INDICATION OF THIS WAS LAST-MINUTE "DISCOVERY" OF NEARLY UNANIMOUS VOTE FOR KHALATBARY BY ENTIRE VILLAGE OF 1100 VOTERS JUST WHEN IT APPEARED HE WAS ABOUT TO BE DEFEATED. IN FINAL TALLY KHALATBARY WON BY ONLY 646 VOTES OUT OF 16,000 CAST. MARDOM PARTY HAS CALLED FOR INVESTIGATION OF THIS INCIDENT AND HAS ATTACKED LEGITIMACY OF KHALATBARY'S ELECTION. OTHER INDICATIONS THAT OUTCOME OF ELECTION WAS PREPLANNED ARE STATEMENT BY SHAHSAVAR MININT OFFICIAL TO EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEE BEFORE VOTE WAS COUNTED THAT KHALATBARY WOULD WIN BY LESS THAN 1000 VOTES AND PUBLIC BOASTING BY IRAN NOVIN DEPUTY REGIONAL CHIEF FARAHMAND EARLIER IN WEEK THAT VICTORY FOR IRAN NOVIN WAS A CERTAINTY (HE WAS CALLED ON TO TEHRAN AND REPRIMANDED BY AMOUZEGAR FOR MAKING THIS STATEMENT).
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ANOTHER IRREGULARITY WHICH HAS COME TO EMBASSY'S ATTENTION WAS WIDESPREAD SALE OF VOTING CARDS, A CUSTOMARY OCCURRENCE IN PAST ELECTIONS, ALTHOUGH PRICE OF CARDS IN SHAHSAVAR WAS ABOUT DOUBLE THAT ASKED DURING NOVEMBER 1973 BY -ELECTION IN GORGON.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH GOI HAD REPEATEDLY CLAIMED SHAHSAVAR ELECTIONS WOULD BE FREE AND HAD TAKEN MEASURES TO ENSURE THAT BLATANT ABUSES OF PAST DID NOT OCCUR, MOST LOCAL RESIDENTS

APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SKEPTICAL OF THESE PROMISES AND TO HAVE
ADOPTED WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE. POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THIS
ELECTION--BROADER PARTICIPATION (ESPECIALLY AMONG WOMEN),
FEWER RESTRAINTS ON OPPOSITION CAMPAIGNING AND CRITICISM
(ALTHOUGH ONLY SUBSTANTIVE CAMPAIGN ISSUE WAS WHICH CANDIDATE
BETTER ABLE TO CARRY OUT SHAH'S PROGRAM EFFECTIVELY), AND
MUCH HIGHER PROPORTION OF FINAL VOTE TO MARDOM CANDIDATE--
ARE STEPS IN DIRECTION OF FREER ELECTIONS GOI HAS PROMISED
FOR 1975. BUT OBVIOUS ELECTORAL ABUSES WHICH OCCURRED IN
SPITE OF OFFICIAL ASSURANCES THAT THEY WOULD NOT PROBABLY
WILL STRENGTHEN WIDESPREAD CYNICISM ABOUT GOI'S INTENTIONS
AT FORTHCOMING GENERAL ELECTIONS AND ABOUT AMOUZEGAR'S ABIL-
ITY TO BRING OFF ELECTORAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS TO WHICH
HE IS PLEDGED.
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